

House—or should I say, “*Bienvenue a la Maison Blanche.*” [Laughter]

In 1777, another George W. welcomed to America another Frenchman. His name was Lafayette. The two leaders built a strong friendship based on common values and common virtues. They both recognized the power of human freedom. They both served with courage in freedom's cause, and they both anticipated that freedom would advance in other lands following its victory here in America.

Two centuries later, our two nations are honoring the legacy of Lafayette by helping others resist tyranny and terror. French and American troops are helping to defend a young democracy in Afghanistan. Our two nations support the democratic Government of Lebanon. We agree that reconciliation and democracy in Iraq are vital to the future of the Middle East. And our two nations condemn violations of human rights in Darfur, in Burma, and around the world.

France and the United States can meet great challenges when we work together, Mr. President. You and I share a commitment to deepen the cooperation of our two republics, and through this cooperation, we can make the world a better place.

I look forward to our discussions at Mount Vernon, where George Washington welcomed his friend Lafayette. And in the spirit of our friendship, I offer a toast to you and to some of America's oldest friends, the free people of France.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:35 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Sarkozy.

Interview With TF1 Television of France

November 6, 2007

France-U.S. Relations

Patrick Poivre d'Arvor. Mr. President, good evening.

The relations between France and the United States for a long time had cooled down for quite some time, for about 3 years, since the intervention in Iraq and since the opposition of three major countries—Russia, Germany, and France. And this quote was

lent to your administration, whereby we should forgive Russia, forget Germany, and punish France—and France was punished for its rebelliousness. And number two, is the punishment over?

The President. First of all, I never really felt that a disagreement over Iraq should yield a rupture in relations. I fully understand why people disagree with my decision, and so I never really subscribed to that theory. So there's no punishment, really, in my—from my perspective.

Secondly, I value the relationship a lot. And the United States and France have had a long history. After all, much of our independence was achieved as a result of the aid of the French. And we have been through wars together; we've had our agreements and our disagreements. So I've really worked hard to make sure the relationship was bigger than the individuals.

Having said that, you've got a new President who brings an energy level that is exciting—

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France

Mr. d'Arvor. Has that changed the situation somewhat, given the fact that Mr. Sarkozy has replaced Mr. Chirac?

The President. Of course, in the sense that every individual matters. In other words, I've dealt with a lot of foreign leaders, and some—and each person brings their own set of personalities and values. And President Sarkozy is a man of deep values. He's got a lot of energy. He's a lot of fun to be around. Plus, he's a serious man, and he wants to—so he's like me; he wants to solve problems—“Here is a problem; let's go solve it.”

And so I'm looking forward to visiting with him. The relationship is good, and I intend to work to keep it that way.

Iraq

Mr. d'Arvor. With distance, do you think that the French arguments at the time—whereby there were no weapons of mass destruction, which was proven; there's no direct relationship with the September 11th attacks. So do you think that these arguments were justified? So don't you regret it after all?

The President. No, I don't at all. Absolutely, getting rid of Saddam Hussein was the

right thing to do. Now, first of all, nobody ever said that the September 11th attacks were ordered by Saddam. That's myth. That was never part of my argument.

And secondly, I did go to the United Nations Security Council—and 1441 was supported by the French—which said, disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. You wouldn't say that if you didn't believe he had weapons of mass destruction.

Now, in hindsight, he didn't. Do I think the world is better off without him? Absolutely. I know Iraq is as well. And so my decision was the right decision.

Again, I understand why people don't like the use of armed force. That's natural. On the other hand, the liberation of 25 million people is noble. And now the question is, will we work together to help this young democracy survive in the face of extremists and radicals who kill the innocent in order to achieve their political objectives?

And I can't thank President Sarkozy enough for sending the Foreign Minister to Baghdad, which basically said, we want to help you survive. We think democracy is a great alternative to the ideology of mass murderers. And that's the question we're faced with, those of us who live in the free world: Are we willing to help others realize the blessings of freedom for the sake of peace?

Iraq/War on Terror/Spread of Democracy

Mr. d'Arvor. But your father, during the first gulf war, had stopped at the doors of Baghdad. He left Saddam in sight, weakened, in power. So why didn't you do the same thing as him? Did you speak with him? Did he tell you, son, you can do what I did not do 10 years ago? So ultimately, don't you wonder as to that may not be what actually destabilized the region ultimately?

The President. No. I think there is—what we're witnessing is a great clash between radicals and extremists who murder and people who want to live in peace. And the situation was different in 1991 than it was in 2003. After all, the United States has been attacked, and I said that we're going to deal with threats before they fully materialize. It's one of the lessons of September the 11th.

Saddam Hussein was given a chance to disclose or disarm. He chose not to. He was the one who, once again, defied the world. He's the one who basically said, I don't care what the United Nations said and what France and the United States and everybody else on the Security Council said. And so I'm very comfortable with the decision I made.

But you say, does this cause there to be radicalism that causes the murder of the—causes people to lose their life? Absolutely not. What causes people to become radicals is when they become hopeless and frustrated and fall prey to the whims and desires of a bunch of ideologues who murder innocent people—whether it be in Iraq today or in Afghanistan today or whether it be in Lebanon or whether it be in the Palestinian Territories—all trying to stop the advent of democracy because they can't stand the thought of free societies in their midst.

And the challenge for those of us who live in free societies, like I said, and the challenge for President Sarkozy and George W. Bush and other leaders is, are we going to sit back and not care whether people live in freedom, or are we going to help them realize the blessings of liberty? Because liberty will yield the peace we want.

Iran

Mr. d'Arvor. So to a certain extent, you did contribute to giving greater power to Iran, because it no longer is facing its hated enemy on the other side. So now is there a true threat in Iran, and are you ready now to invade Iran as you did with Afghanistan and Iraq? So it is indeed true that Vice President—is it true that Vice President Cheney has a plan for that?

The President. Gosh, I don't know where you're getting all these rumors—there must be some weird things going on in Europe these days—because I have made it abundantly clear, now is the time to deal with a true threat to world peace, that's Iran, and to do it diplomatically and peacefully. And that's what I'm going to spend a lot of time on with President Sarkozy. But of course, we want to solve these problems peacefully.

Mr. d'Arvor. But if it doesn't work, if the sanctions and the threats do not work, what happens?

The President. Well, we are going to—as I said, all options are on the table. But the objective is to make them work. I mean, I’m not so sure I agree with your hypothesis that “if they don’t work.” I’m the kind of guy that says, let’s make sure they do work. And that’s what I intend to talk to President Sarkozy about and Angela Merkel about, and that is to keep the international pressure and to keep the focus on the ambitions of an Iranian regime that has publicly declared its intention to destroy Israel, for example, and have defied the demands of the IAEA. And so they’re not trusted—to be trusted with an enrichment program. We made that abundantly clear to them. And I believe we can solve this problem diplomatically.

But to say that to enhance a free society on Iran’s border strengthens the Iranians is just not true. I simply don’t buy into that logic—or illogic, in this case. I think a free society on Iran’s border is going to be—make their life more difficult. I think that, ultimately, they’re going to feel pressure about the type of government they have when their people look across the border and see a flourishing, free society.

And so our policy is to work with friends and allies to say to the people, here is a problem; let’s work collaboratively to address it, and now, early.

America’s Image Abroad

Mr. d’Arvor. But in spite of all your efforts, the United States today have a worse image today than they had 7 years ago. People find Americans less likeable pretty much everywhere in the world. Do you have your own share of responsibility, or is this inevitable because the United States is the most powerful country in the world?

The President. Look, first of all, I think most people respect America, and they like Americans. They may not necessarily like the President. And so—but I’ve always been the kind of person, Patrick, to make decisions based upon what’s right, as opposed to trying to be the popular guy. I’ve always found the person who strives for popularity—

U.S. Foreign Policy/Freedom Agenda

Mr. d’Arvor. In the past, we used to say that the American Dream was freedom, but

today it seems to be repression, more self-focused society.

The President. Oh, no, that’s absurd. That’s absurd to say the American Dream is repression. Freedom is the absolute we’re helping people achieve. That’s—think about what’s happening with 25 million people in Iraq or 25 million people in Afghanistan or the fact that the United States is freeing people from the scourge of HIV/AIDS. We’re spending \$30 billion, when Congress passes my budget, to help people on HIV/AIDS—or the fact that we’ve got a \$1.6 billion program to help people who are—families who are suffering as a result of a child dying from malaria. In other words, we’ve got a very aggressive freedom agenda. And if you come to the United States, you’ll find that you can practice your religion any way you see fit, that this is an open society and a free society.

And so, yes, I understand people’s—the image may not be as good as one would like, but people respect what America stands for. They may not like the decisions I have made, but I don’t see how you can be a leader if you worry about public opinion polls all the time, particularly in a world in which there’s a lot of problems that require strong leadership.

President’s Legacy

Mr. d’Arvor. And what legacy, what record would you like to leave in history? You’ve spent 7 years in the White House. You’ll be leaving in a year. What would you like the memory, the souvenir of you to remain?

The President. Well, certainly the fact that 50 million people have been liberated; that we’ve got a very strong relationship in the Far East; that we’re friends with China, Japan, and South Korea—something that’s been hard for other Presidents to do. I think we can help stand up a Palestinian state. I’m the first President ever to have articulated a two-party state, two states side by side in peace. Our HIV/AIDS initiative is very strong. I mean, we’re leading the world when it comes to helping feed the hungry or take care of those who are ill. I think our malaria initiative will go down in history as a great initiative.

And at home, some of my education initiatives and the fact that our economy has

grown, in spite of recession, corporate scandals, and war and the attack on America. See, I'm a tax cutter. I believe when people have more money in their pockets, they do better.

And so I'm—you know, it's an interesting thing about history. You're really not going to know the history of the Bush administration until long after you and I are dead. There's no such thing as accurate, short-term history. It takes awhile for people to see the results of decisions having been made.

And so I'm very comfortable, Patrick. I feel comfortable that the decisions I have made have been in the best interests of the country. I've been comfortable that I've had to deal with some tough problems, and I didn't shy away from the problems; I tackled them head on. And I love my country, and I love what we stand for.

2008 Presidential Election

Mr. d'Arvor. And last question—who would you like to see as your replacement in 1 year? A Republican? A Democrat?

The President. Of course a Republican. But I'm not—you're trying to get me to take sides.

Mr. d'Arvor. You prefer Republican.

The President. Absolutely a Republican.

Mr. d'Arvor. A woman? An African American? A veteran? Do you have a choice? Are there any people that you like more than others?

The President. Now see, you're trying to cleverly—cleverly draw me into the race for the Presidency. And one of the things that I have told the American people is, I'm going to watch the Republican primaries unfold and not take positions and then go out and help my party's nominee win. And I think we will win the White House. I think whoever will get nominated from our party will win, because the big issues in America are who's going to be tough in this war on terror and who's going to protect our homeland and will they keep taxes low. And our candidates will be willing to take those positions in a way that appeals to the American people.

But, anyway, nice try trying to get me to endorse a candidate.

President's Vacation/France-U.S. Relations

Mr. d'Arvor. We saw a French President spend his summer vacations this year in the United States. So when will George W. Bush spend his vacations in France?

The President. Thank you very much. As you know, I'm a—I've got a piece of property I love in Texas—

Mr. d'Arvor. It's large.

The President. —very much, and when I do, I like to go down there. But I would love to come back to France. It's a beautiful country. I've had some really good experiences there, and I've found the people to be very friendly.

And, look, I understand there's disagreements. But from my perspective, the people of France really do respect what America has stood for and respect our alliance. And I was greeted with great respect when I went there. And so I'd like to come back sometimes.

And I'm looking forward to my meeting with President Sarkozy. It's going to be a constructive meeting.

Mr. d'Arvor. Once again, thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you very much for hosting us.

The President. Yes, sir. Thank you very much.

Mr. d'Arvor. Thank you very much.

The President. You bet.

Mr. d'Arvor. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:12 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Bernard Kouchner of France; and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. Mr. d'Arvor referred to former President Jacques Chirac of France. Portions of the Mr. d'Arvor's remarks were in French, and no translation was provided. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 7. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Interview With RTL Television and N-TV of Germany

November 6, 2007

Chancellor Angela Merkel's Visit to the Bush Ranch

Q. Mr. President, in a couple of days, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, will come to your ranch, which I think is a special privilege. What will you do with her on the ranch on a weekend like that?

The President. Well, we will—if she wants—we'll do anything she wants. If she wants to go for a hike, I'll go for a hike. If she—I look forward to showing a piece of property I dearly love. But we'll have plenty of time to visit in a different setting. It's not very formal, but it will be conducive to a conversation amongst friends. I can't thank her enough for coming down there.

Germany/United Nations Security Council

Q. She had said some weeks ago at the United Nations that Germany wants to contribute more to the world and take on more responsibility by perhaps getting a permanent seat in the Security Council. Will you support her in that?

The President. Well, I made my clear statement there at the U.N. that I'm for over-all reform, and I do believe we ought to look at reforming the Security Council in a way that, you know, accomplishes some missions. And Germany clearly is an important country. I have not taken a stand on any specific country, except for Japan, and won't. But clearly, Germany is a very important country for a lot of reasons.

Q. Not a permanent member in the Security Council, you don't see her like that? You don't see Germany as—

The President. Well, I haven't made that endorsement one way or the other. And I pretty well kept my counsel. I just want to make sure the U.N. is functioning well, that it does—it needs a big-time reform and so does the Security Council. And so we're open to ideas. It's not easy to get done. And the only one country that I've endorsed has been Japan. And it's been a longstanding policy of the Government of the United States, and I continue that policy.

Germany-U.S. Relations

Q. What are the topics that you will be talking to her where you might need Germany to help you, the United States?

The President. Oh, me personally?

Q. No, not personally. I mean—personally, as well, but—

The President. No, but we definitely need Germany's help on issues like Iran so that we can, you know, solve this issue diplomatically. We need Germany's help on issues like Darfur. Germany is a crucial country in terms of, you know, building coalitions to deal with the threats we face. We need Germany's participation in Afghanistan. I know Angela went over there; I'm looking forward to hearing her report. And I'm pleased with our relationship.

Germany's Role in Afghanistan

Q. Germany doesn't want to contribute any forces to the south of Afghanistan, where it's really getting a little bit hotter than up in the north, where the Germans are right now. Are you having a problem with that?

The President. No, I understand. I mean, you know, people—everybody's Parliaments or legislative bodies reacts to the challenges differently. I'm just so pleased that Germany is contributing forces there to help this Afghan democracy. These contributions are meaningful, and some countries are able to take on different assignments. And I fully understand that. And I'm not going to try to put Angela Merkel in a position that she nor her Bundestag is comfortable with.

Iran/Iraq

Q. You just mentioned Iran. Do you think that the nuclear threat that Iran poses right now is larger than the threat Iraq posed about 5 or 6 years ago?

The President. I think they were both dangerous. I think both of them could have been solved diplomatically. Saddam Hussein chose to ignore the demands of the free world and Security Council 1441—which, by the way, Germany voted for initially. And I think they're both dangerous. And I think therefore, the lesson of Iraq is that we can work together and solve questions peacefully now.